

Creating God Opportunities
How to Spread the Gospel Effectively
1 Corinthians 9:19-23
November 23-24, 2024

“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” (Colossians 4:5-6).

Introduction

- Accidental vs intentional opportunities
 - The Year Theme – this whole year, 2024 was the focus on the theme, The YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY and we talked about **the life of Christ and how He made the most of all the opportunities that the Father and Holy Spirit laid out for Him.**
 - Focus – **the primary focus so far has been how to engage with opportunities around us that the Holy Spirit sets up.** In other words, are we going to respond properly when the Lord puts something in our path? Are we going to track on His voice to hear His prompting? Are we going to see His movements to join in. In other words, will we be responsive to God’s initiation?
 - Shift in Focus for Today – Today, I would like to **shift the focus from responding to all the work that God has done and transfer our attention to the work that WE SHOULD be doing in the Lord’s name.**
 - God Initiates, We Manage - **Although the Lord always initiates the ministry opportunity, we can either doing it well or do it poorly.**
 - Divine encounter with old friend - If God gives us a divine encounter with an old friend, we can either ruin it in the first five minutes or strategically advance it in the first five minutes.
 - New job or position - When we are placed in a new position or new job at work and work with a new team, we can either secure a place as a blessing or as a curse to those people.
 - Goal: I want us to spend some quality time today **learning the art of stewarding opportunities and creating healthy opportunities for God to flow through us.** Because...

Effective MINISTRY requires proper PREPARATION

- God can always do things without us and despite us – **But we want to be His children and partners that seamlessly flow along with Him and allow the Holy Spirit to move without us messing it up.** We want to be the people of God who strategically know how to start and guide conversations in an intentional way toward the Lord without being awkward and weird for no reason. We want to be a congregation filled with equipped individuals to be salt and light in a powerful way in culture and in our friend groups.
- So how do we do that? – **Next year** we are going to do double down on equipping all of us to share our faith naturally with everyone we know, **but today** I want to just

break the surface and **the fastest way to do that is to study a master in it: Paul the Apostle**. Please turn with me to 1st Corinthians 9:19-23...

Lesson

- 1 Co 9:19–23 – *“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”*
- Paul the Apostle – **perhaps the greatest evangelist the world has ever known, certainly the most famous**. Paul traveled as a missionary **over 10,000 miles**¹ (one person calculated 10,282 miles which would take 281 days of travel time and cost quite a bit for sailing) to share the gospel. He ministered on **2 continents** and through modern-day **Israel, Syria, Turkey & Greece**. The Book of Acts chronicles 3 of his major missionary journeys which constitute the last 13 years of Paul’s life (he likely did a lot more ministry prior). He was **saved** around 33AD around the age of **28** and died in 65AD so his Christian life lasted about 32 years (he was likely born around 5AD and **lived roughly 60 years**) or **half of his life**. He was ministering in some capacity from conversion on. Acts just focuses on the specific missionary journeys that expanded the church into the world (the theme of the book) which happened toward the end of his life. God used him to plant **at least 14 new churches** if not closer to 20 in his lifetime. God broke ground on the continent of **Europe** for Christianity through this man and he is a big reason why Christianity went **worldwide** (and here in America).
- Paul’s Method - **Let’s study his method on how he found who he found, how he reached who he reached and what his strategy was.**
- Paul’s Story – it’s helpful to do a **quick summary run through** of Paul’s life from beginning to end to **get the gist** and **then we dig down into specific skills and principles he used** that allowed him to successfully allow the Lord to change the world through him.
 - Paul’s Conversion - Acts 9:1-19 – Paul tells his **testimony** personally at least **3 times** recorded in Scripture. The gist is this: he was a **hardcore religious leader** that **hated Christians** and went out of his way to imprison and persecute them. One day he was on another mission to get some when a **bright light shone** down on him from heaven, and **he fell to his knees**. **A voice asked him**, ‘why are you persecuting me?’ Paul asked, ‘who are you?’ The voice replied, **‘I am Jesus** whom you are persecuting.’ Paul was **blinded** and had to be led into the city by

friends. He was met by a Christian man named **Ananias** who **shared the truth** with him and **prayed for his eyesight** which was restored. Paul was never the same.

- **Experiential Duplication** – **it's very common for Christians to try to reach others for Christ in the manner that they received him themselves.**
 - **Mom power** - If your mom led you to Christ you have a high value for parental ministry.
 - **Street ministry** - If you got saved from a tough life on the streets through bold confrontation, you feel called to street ministry.
 - **Intellectual avenues** - If you got saved through reading books about Jesus, you will tend to think that most people get saved through materials and communication.
 - **Helpful variety** - The truth is that all of that is true and yes, it's very helpful that each of us minister to others in the way that we had Christ revealed to us at first, because that allows a more varied approach of the gospel. If it mattered to us it will likely matter to someone else.
 - **Danger: don't assume** - But we must never believe that is the **ONLY** way that people can be saved, nor even the **BEST** way that people get saved.
 - **The best way** - The best way is the way that God creates.
- **Paul's Dilemma** – In regard to Paul **duplicating** with others what he experienced, **he has a bit of a problem.** He got saved by a **direct interaction** with Jesus Christ and through a **series of miracles.** He can't have a ministry that forces Jesus to personally show up and audibly speak to people, right? **BUT, he can have a ministry that engages people WITH Christ directly AND have a ministry that is miraculous in nature.** And that's just what he did.
- **Paul's First Mission Field (Jews)** - Acts 9:19-22 – The Book of Acts tells us that **Paul immediately began to tell people that Jesus is the Son of God in the synagogues.** His own people. They were amazed largely because he was so well known as being anti-Christian. **His dramatic change gave him an opening.** He was a baller in the Jewish community and well-respected. **For a short time he could leverage that authority and respect to get a hearing.** Little by little that diminished as he was slowly considered more Jewish than Pharisee over time. But **his first mission field was ALWAYS the Jews.** **Yes, he received an assignment to the Gentiles, outside his comfort zone** (because no one else was doing it well enough), but that wasn't his first zone.
- **Paul's Most Common Opening (Miracles)** – to be honest and this may challenge most of us, **Paul's main opening (not his main start. His main start was teaching in synagogues) in a lot of the cities and towns he ministered in a radical miracle that got everyone's attention.** It was the paralyzed guy in Lydda region (Acts 9:32-35), raising the female disciple Tabitha to life in Joppa (Acts 9:36-43), etc. The challenge for us is that **IF we didn't operate in the supernatural like Paul this would never have happened with us in his role. It would have been a short and less productive trip. Supernatural ministry matters.**

- Paul's First Mission Trip – Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to go out into the mission field after a number of years doing ministry locally. This was a 2-3 year trip (46AD-48AD). They went from location to location sharing the good news and doing good works:
 - Island of Cyprus (Acts 13:1-12) – their first stop was the island of Cyprus. He blinded a male witch, and a politician got saved from seeing it.
 - Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13ff) – started in the synagogue and preached the big picture truth to a Jewish audience. They ate it up. It gathered almost the whole city. It got derailed by radical Jewish group.
 - Iconium (Acts 14:1-7) – started with the Jews but hit opposition again, but they stuck it out and God did radical miracles through them, and it split the city. They got chased out eventually.
 - Lystra (Acts 14:8-23) – They healed a crippled guy, and everyone freaked out and thought they were amazing. Then persecution hit and Paul was stoned to death (he got up).
 - They finished and reported back to the sending church.
- Paul's Second Mission Trip – Paul split with Barnabas for the next one and got a great guy named Silas (Acts 15:40), and they set out with Paul's protégé Timothy tagging along. This was a 3-4 year trip (49AD-52AD).
 - The Macedonian Call (Acts 16:6-10) – The group struggled to discern where they should go to ministry because at every attempt they were blocked and it almost felt like God was blocking them (He was). They ended up on a beach in Troas and Paul had a vision of a Greek guy calling for help. Paul knew it was a sign to launch into Macedonia (Europe) to the Gentiles there, which was a brand new concept.
 - Philippi (Acts 16:11-40) – found a prayer meeting of women who were seeking God and started there (they had no connections). *"The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."* She got saved and they set up a location there. They ended up casting a demon out of a young girl while in the city and were thrown into prison. God used it to reach the jailer through an earthquake miracle. They were released and kicked out.
 - Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9) – Paul ministered in the synagogues as normal proving Jesus was the Messiah. It was working well, but they were persecuted by jealous Jews again and a team member was arrested. They had to flee.
 - Berea (Acts 17:10-15) – They had a healthy interaction in the synagogue with Jews who wanted to know the truth. Lots got saved. Persecution arrived from the outside and they had to leave.
 - Athens (Acts 17:16-34) – Paul was waiting for his team to catch up in Athens when he noticed rampant paganism. He saw an altar to 'the unknown God' as a catch all and it gave him an idea. He talked to the leadership and influencers and used that as a starting point to share the Lord.

- Corinth (Acts 18:1-17) – Paul meets partners Aquila and Priscilla and teams up. Paul stayed there 18 months doing the tough work via the encouragement of God. He was persecuted and chased out again.
- He came home and connected with the church.
- Paul's Third Missionary Trip – Paul again set out with a goal of strengthening the churches and believers that had been saved through the first two missionary trips. This was a 3-4 year trip (53AD-57AD).
 - Ephesus (Acts 19:1-41) – Paul's ministry at Ephesus was tough, wild and significant (2 years long) (*"all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks"*). It was a VERY supernatural location and that was the primary focus of Paul's ministry efforts there (*"And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them"*). The Holy Spirit would come on people, and they would burst out in tongues. He tried to talk to the Jews, but they weren't having it, and he went to the Gentile areas. He did a lot of demon casting, and the city went into revival. But then it went into a riot due to the impact of the revival on pagan business.
 - Lots of travel and then back to Asia (Troas) (Acts 20:1-16) – it was here that Paul preached so long, and the air was so thick that a young kid fell out of a 3 story window and died. Paul was given the power to resurrect him.
 - Brief Ephesus connect (again) (Acts 20:17-38) – Paul had the elders come to him at the port to explain his next move (go to Jerusalem) and the danger waiting there. He prayed with them and encouraged each other.
 - Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-26:32) – a huge chunk of the end of the book of Acts is chronicling Paul in Jerusalem at this time. It got really complicated and he went on trial. At first it was good to be home, and Paul saw the leader of the church (Jesus' brother James) and the elders. He told them all the great things God was doing among the Gentiles. Paul had a bad reputation (falsely of course) so he was encouraged to clear things up in the temple. He tried. It didn't go well. Lies were said and he was arrested. Paul tried to defend himself and tell his testimony and it was good until he told them that God called him to the Gentiles. They lost their minds. He was taken by the Roman authorities, and they found out he was a Roman citizen so he went through their court systems. Radical Jewish group tried to kill him, so Rome moved him around. Eventually Paul appealed to Caesar in Rome, and he was shipped out.
- Paul's Trip to Rome (Acts 27:1–28:31) - During Paul's third missionary trip it was derailed when he was arrested. He went through the Roman court system and ultimately appealed to the highest court in Rome. They had to sail there, and it wasn't a good time of year. It got messy, to say the least. At the end of his stay in the Rome area he was not just under arrest but ultimately he was beheaded.

- Tough Sailing and Storms – it was a very dangerous voyage and ultimately it got so bad that they were about to die. They finally were shipwrecked on the island of Malta.
 - Malta Ministry – Once on the island Paul was bitten by a venomous snake but didn't die and the islanders were in awe. They brought Paul to their leader who was sick, and Paul healed him which led to a revival of sorts.
 - Arrival at Rome – finally Paul got to Rome and Paul was under house arrest but was able to be in close contact with the church there. He was there 2 years and he did his best to keep ministering no matter what the obstacles.
- Paul's Teaching on Sharing our Faith – Paul wrote at least 13 books of the New Testament, so we have a lot of his material to study. Three of his books were specifically to young pastors telling them about leadership and how to do church things (1 & 2nd Timothy & Titus), but he also shared knowledge and wisdom to the Church as a whole in his other writings. Here's a synopsis:
 - Romans – Much of Romans is talking to Christians about theology and the Christian life. When it comes to evangelism Romans focuses more on the works of God and His sovereign role in our getting saved (e.g. predestination, calling, set apart, etc.). That doesn't mean that he is not going to teach on our part in the process too. From the get-go he says, *"...we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.."* We have a role and we've been equipped to do it. A few standout points I see in the book are:
 - God has made Himself knowable – any ministry we do is on top of God's initiation and activity already present.
 - Evangelism theology – mankind is broken and therefore we are all selfish by nature and that keeps separating us from God. Part of reaching people is helping them discover their actual need for God and why their brokenness is hurting them. We were born in sin and most of our actions since then have affirmed we are sinners. Only salvation, which gives us a new nature, and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit can make someone good (sanctification). The only way we can engage with God's saving is surrender and faith (Romans 10:9 - *"if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*). Our goal is not to purify the people around us (sin management), but to get them next to Jesus so they can be transformed by the Holy Spirit from their spirit, through their mind/heart, and outward. Christ died for sinners and He's the one that cleans them up.
 - Don't just others – we have so many issues of our own it's silly to be focused on trying to fix other people. Yes their sin matters, but that's God's main business (healing them).
 - There's danger for the lost – it's clear in Scripture that those who do not have Jesus as their Savior (rescuer) are going to die separated from God and that will be for eternity. Therefore there's an impetus for us to share our faith.

Romans 10:14 reminds us of the process. People can't believe in something they do not know. It's our job to spread the news to them.

- Love is the central fact – Paul reminds us of the words of Jesus to love our neighbor as ourself – love does no wrong to a neighbor.
- 1st Corinthians – First Corinthians is a letter written to a crazy, messed up, newbie church. Most of it is corrective to Christians who don't know what they are doing. But along the way there are a few nuggets on this subject that we can grab:
 - Sharing our faith is simple but our message seems silly to some unsaved – Paul said that God has used common people with a simple truth of the gospel to save people. That message is not accepted by all. It seems foolish to some, but our job is to spread the simple truth. We don't have to be special or brilliant to share our faith. God designed a system that anyone can do it.
 - We need to minimize obstacles for people coming to faith – we can't allow our own sense of rights, or money, or anything else stand in the way of the gospel being shared. That is our primary role. Speaking of Paul not making use of his right to get paid for ministering, he said, "...we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ." (1 Cor 9:12)
 - Morphing to Minister – this is the famous passage that we are going through today. Paul says that he becomes all things to all men that he might save some.
 - Love is central – again we see Paul highlight love. This is the famous LOVE Chapter (13) talking about the deep nature of how we ought to love people around us. It involves patience and kindness, humility, not pushy, etc.
 - The basic information of the gospel (15:3-8) – Paul boils down the core INFO to know and share when it comes to the 'good news'. It is: Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He rose on the 3rd day. He proved that by showing up to many people. That's it. Jesus is alive and it changes everything. That is our message.
- 2nd Corinthians – Second Corinthians is similar to the first volume. It's to Christians about Christian life and Christian things. But again, along the way we can dig up some thoughts on sharing our faith as well.
 - Never manipulate – a great line in this book is, "*We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.*" (4:2). He also highlighted this in the book/letter of Philippians.
 - He said it to the Thessalonians too – 1 Th 2:3-6 - "*For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for*

greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others,..."

- Unbelievers are blinded by Satan – the reason why the world doesn't see God or the world like we do is that they are blinded (just like we were) by the Devil. He has them distracted and falling into lies.
- Theology of reconciliation to God – Paul shares a great summation that our job is to tell people about their opportunity to be reconciled with God (turn from enemies into children), through Christ's work on the cross.
- Galatians – this is another letter to Christians about Christian living and Christian problems.
 - Reiterating faith, not works – Galatians 2-4 talks again about how we are saved by faith and not by good things that we do.
 - Opportunity to become children of God – a beautiful teaching in chapter 4 talks about how we are adopted as children of God and we have the Holy Spirit and can call out, 'Abba Father.'
- Ephesians – another church that is going through problems like Corinth gets a letter from Paul too, to get them back in line. It's a lot of simplified theology (what Christians should believe) and focuses on the grace God exhibits in saving us. It's like a mini-Romans.
 - Grace, grace, grace – we don't deserve any saving. God is just so loving that He wanted to save. We didn't earn any of our salvation, nor do we keep it by good works. It's all a gift. (chapter 2)
 - Defense & weapons against spiritual warfare – Chapter 6 is famous for the 'armor of God' teaching. What we do is supernatural, and this gives us a metaphor about how we are equipped to handle it.
- Philippians – Philippians is kind of a thank-you letter to a church that really loved and supported Paul. But of course there are some things that Paul needs to speak into about how they are viewing and handling things. It's a lot of Christian-based talk but there are a couple things I found.
 - Even bad stuff can open doors – At the beginning Paul talks about all the terrible stuff that had happened to him and his arrest but then said, 'But God used it to reach all kinds of people.' Sometimes we need to remember that God can use anything and everything to reach people. We may be a living example.
 - Motives matter – Paul was frustrated that by this time in Church history, some were preaching the gospel for bad reasons and due to bad motivations (envy, rivalry). He reminds us that love has to be our constant motivation.
 - Humility – Jesus Christ was the epitome of humble and we need to follow His example. We are not to be selfish but to look to the needs of others around us.
- Colossians – Colossians is a small letter to a church that was being attacked by false teachers. This is a theology correction letter so it's a lot of words to Christians about their beliefs.

- Intentional, smart, and strategic – *“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”* (4:5-6).
- 1st Thessalonians – this is a letter to a young Gentile church and is full of advice on Christian living, but wow there are a couple incredible insights on sharing our faith in here.
 - 1 Th 1:4–5 – *“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”*
 - Gospel in word and in power is the best combination for reaching the lost – I realize that not all of us move in the power of the Spirit or have gifting in the areas of supernatural acts, but all of us have the Holy Spirit who can do anything. It’s critical that we build up our theology and our abiding so that the Lord can move unhindered through us.
 - We need to believe it 100% - sometimes we are kind of lackadaisical about our faith (not that fired up) and we expect that when we share it with others that they should take it very seriously. Their initial connection with it won’t likely exceed our own (until they have their own faith and they may leave us in the dust). If we don’t believe it 100% and own it, why should we expect them to believe us?
 - Our character matters – notice Paul’s phrase about what type of men they were among the Thessalonians: men of high character. Our character either supports the gospel or undermines it. We cannot preach it and not walk it.
 - We don’t manipulate or share out of selfish gain – see above in 2nd Corinthians for a more full list of how many times Paul talks about this.
 - 1 Th 2:3–6 - *“For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others,...”*
 - We don’t deceive – this would mean sharing bad information with people because it sounds better.
 - We don’t alter it to please mankind – we are held accountable to God and He is the One we should please.
 - We don’t manipulatively flatter – we don’t say things that aren’t true to try to manipulate hearts with false positivity just to get in people’s pockets.
 - Money can’t be the motive – greed has no place in gospel sharing or ministry. (cf. 1 Thess 2:9-11 – it has to be totally about them and not us).
 - Self-glory cannot be a part of it – it’s tempting to try to minister as a win-win: we get glory and God gets glory. But that will mess everything up. It’s God only.

- 2nd Thessalonians – This was a follow up letter to that new Gentile church and addressed some Christian living (don't be lazy; persecution is seen by God) and some theology pieces (Jesus hadn't come back already). I didn't see any blatant teachings on sharing out faith other than prayer opening doors (I highlighted that below in the proper section).
- 1st Timothy – This is a letter to a young pastor (Paul's protégé) and it is all about how to be a good minister/pastor. Timothy had the toughest assignments (e.g. Ephesus). This is a lot of teaching on how to run a church, so a lot of it is Christian living and internally focused, but there is one thing to highlight about how to reach the world around us.
 - Good reminder: Jesus saves sinners – 1 Ti 1:15 - *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,..."* Too often we are surprised by the sin around us and try to avoid those people when in fact they are who Jesus came for. We were those people (and sometimes still are). Jesus didn't come to clean up mostly righteous people, He came to radically rescue lost people. We need to watch our mindset and realize that we are supposed to see mess in people, it's part of the job.
- 2nd Timothy – This is a secondary letter to Paul's protégé about how to lead a church well. It has a lot of focus on right doctrine since that's always being challenged. Most of it doesn't apply to this topic but there is one highlight I'll cite.
 - Sharing our faith with the world is difficult (3:10ff) – Paul's ministry was full of pain, difficulty, resistance and suffering. Although we may not have that severe or a reaction in modern-day America, there is going to be resistance, and we will feel rejected because of it.
- Titus – Just as Paul wrote to Timothy a young pastor, instructing him on how to run a church, so too did he write to another young protégé, Titus. I found a one good reminder on this topic.
 - Never forget where you came from (3:1-7) – it's very common for Christians to start out with a memory of where they came from but oddly we still get a little judgmental since we are leaving it behind. But the longer we are living with Christ and made lifestyle decisions to be healthier, we tend to get even more judgmental as if we forgot that we were once just like the world. We must not do that, or we are going to come across as offensive.
- Philemon – This is a personal letter to a slave owner about releasing a slave that had runaway and found themselves in Paul's care and got saved and entered the ministry. It doesn't have much to do with our topic at hand.
- Summation of Paul's Teaching on Evangelism and Ministry – As you can see **Paul was very consistent in his theology about evangelism and his directions on how to do it. Paul was fully focused on his task at hand. He lived and died sharing the gospel and trying to make the most of every opportunity. He would shift and morph into every environment to create windows of opportunity to minister to people. He**

was brilliant and so strategic. We ought to be the same. So, what can we take from all of this? I have 8 principles to focus on (although there are many more).

- The Premise Passage - 1 Co 9:19–23 – *“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”*
- Principles from Paul’s Life and Ministry
 1. Tell Your Story – Paul shared his personal testimony over and over again. Every time he did people were impacted. It’s our secret weapon and most powerful tool. It’s something that you already know. It’s something you are relatively comfortable knowing the material. It will sound the most natural. It’s real. It’s true. It’s the least stressful. It’s just storytelling and talking. I realize that some people are very nervous about sharing their personal life and that is where you are going to need to be pushed out of your comfort zone.
 - Fewer people are moved by data and information than by real life stories – What people are looking for is something real. You don’t have a lot of proof of the existence of God, but the one that you have is your life evidence. You changed. Why? God. You don’t have all the answers, but you are walking evidence that He’s real. Start with that.
 - Create the right time – In most interactions with people in your life there will come a natural time when you can share your story. If not, and it’s been awhile, it’s important that you intentionally create an opportunity for you to share your story. It can be an invite to coffee just to tell your story.
 2. Leverage your transformation – if you were known to be one sort of person and God changed you dramatically, use that to your advantage. It’s captivating to hear about someone being radically changed. Share the old you versus the new you. Don’t explain it like a done deal and now you are perfect, but a process. If you had a more visibly mellow transformation externally, then tell the story of the inside transformation. Share about your thought process, your perspective on life, your resistance to things about God and church. If you were saved from a young age and you don’t have a transformation story, use other’s testimonies to connect with those you love and are ministering to. Let the stories of others around you help related the gospel in terms they can understand.
 3. Leverage your social circle – Paul immediately went to the Jews before the Gentiles. Why? Because those are his people that he had the most in common with. He could talk their talk and knew their lifestyles. He knew their mindset. He understood why they do what they do. He had less social barriers or obstacles to

go over than if he immediately went into a foreign ministry. We ought to do the same thing. Before we start worrying about global missions we need to realize that **we will speak easiest and best with people that are similar to us.** If you are **wealthy** you have access to the wealthy. If you are **poor** you have access to the needy. If you are **black** you'll have access to the black community. If you are a **business leader** then access people in the business world. **You have a built-in-mission field the MOMENT you are saved because you are saved IN THE MIDST of an experience and life place.** Leverage that.

4. Watch for God's Open Doors – Over and over we see in Paul's ministry **God's guidance**, and it seems like God was just telling him audibly where to go and what to do but nothing could be further from the truth. To Paul a lot of it seemed random and mysterious. He was just doing what was in front of him and trusting that God was guiding him. **One of his most significant moves was shifting his ministry off the continent of Asia (Middle East) and into Europe (Greece).** That would have never happened if Paul didn't **pay attention to a dream of a Greek guy** calling for help and tying that into the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And Paul wouldn't have been stuck on that beach if he had not allowed the Lord to block his other attempts to go elsewhere. **Too often we try to force something that God hasn't opened yet.** We need to be attentive and soft toward God.
 - God opens doors – 1 Cor 16:8-9 – *"I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has open to me,..."* (cf. 2 Cor 2:12-13)
 - Prayer opens doors – Col 4:3 – *"pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ..."* (cf. 2 Thess 3:1-2)
5. Be Alert – One of Paul's coolest stories of his life was when he was **in Philippi jail with Silas, and they were praying and singing hymns.** There was a huge **earthquake** that God caused, and the doors opened and chains fell off. Paul calmed **the jailer**, and he **got saved.** They got released from jail but had to leave the city. **If Paul would have thought that he was OFF DUTY during a bad time in jail, he would have missed the opportunity.** If he would have been bitter and angry about his situation (because it was unfair) he would have ruined his witness. **We need to be aware that no matter if we think we are ON OR OFF we are ON.** The Holy Spirit is using us either directly or indirectly at any given time.
6. Start From Where THEY Are – Maybe the most famous message that Paul preached was in **Athens Greece.** He walked through the city ahead of time and **examined their culture and what mattered to them.** He then addressed the influencers by talking to them about common interests: Religion. They were super pagan but he saw the craving of the supernatural. Instead of attacking them, he helped to explain the 'unknown God' they were seeking. It was very effective.
7. Partner Up When Possible – **Paul rarely did ministry alone. He knew that we are better together.** Some of his most powerful ministry was done with partners and a team. Some of his closest partnerships were his missionary partners like Barnabas and Silas, or his proteges like Timothy and Titus, or his friends like

Aquila and Priscilla. Jesus sent out His guys two-by-two for a reason. I always am suspect about Christians who can only minister by themselves. Usually there is a lack of self-awareness there and an unwillingness to work together.

8. Never Manipulate – One thing that Paul talked about extensively is that any sharing of the gospel or talking to someone who doesn't know the Lord yet, **HAS TO BE FULLY ABOUT THEM. It can't be about what we can get out of it.** This is all them and all God. It must be absolutely unselfish in motive and action and words. We don't needless flatter, we don't seek self-glory, we don't allow greed to be a part of it, we don't see it as a notch on our belt or a power move, it's all about loving them enough to help them meet Jesus. Period. And we never alter the message to make it sound better or add stuff to it so people will like it more. It is what it is. It has enough beauty in it to win anyone's hearts if shared right. We aren't God's PR group nor are we salespeople. We are trustworthy messengers.

- 1 Th 2:3–6 - "For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others,..."

Conclusion

- **Intentionality and Strategic interactions must never be** forced, manipulative, or viewed through the lens that forgets people's hearts.
- **Above all LOVE must guide the process** and the only way to love someone rightly is to **listen to their heart** and meet them where they are at.
- **The salvation of the people you love is not a victory-of-convincing as much as a front row to a miraculous rescue of someone you care about by God.**